

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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R 270850Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9989
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MASERU
AMEMBASSY MBABANE
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 1208

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR SF US LT
SUBJ: BASOTHO REACTIONS TO MONDALE-VORSTER TALKS

1. SUMMARY: LESOTHO IS A UNIQUE LISTENING POST ON SOUTH AFRICA, ITS UNIQUENESS STEMMING FROM BEING A COUNTRY ENTIRELY SURROUNDED BY SOUTH AFRICA. THE DIMENSIONS OF THE RESULTING CONTACTS CAN BE BEST UNDERSTOOD BY THE FACT THAT EVERY COMMUNICATION TO OR FROM LESOTHO, AS WELL AS EVERY IMPORT AND EXPORT, MUST PASS THROUGH SOUTH AFRICA. IN A BRIEF RETURN VISIT TO LESOTHO MAY 24-26, I FOUND GOL OFFICIALS AND NON-OFFICIALS ALIKE HEARTENED AND ENCOURAGED BEYOND THEIR FONDEST EXPECTATIONS BY THE NEW U.S. POLICY TOWARD SOUTH AFRICA, ESPECIALLY AS REVEALED BY VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE'S PRESS CONFERENCE. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE LESOTHO GOVERNMENT IS A LISTENING POST ON SOUTH AFRICA, FINELY TUNED BY YEARS OF LIVING AND DEALING WITH THEIR NEIGHBOR. IN THE COURSE OF A BRIEF RETURN VISIT, I WAS STRUCK BY (A) THE KEEN AWARENESS OF GOL OFFICIALS AND PRIVATE PERSONS OF THE CHANGE IN U.S. POLICY TOWARD SOUTH AFRICA; (B) THE WIDESPREAD UNDERSTANDING OF THE

POLICY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS; (C) THE CONVICTION THAT THE U.S. IS SERIOUS AND THAT THE POLICY IS CREDIBLE; (D) KEEN APPROVAL OF THE NEW POLICY TOWARD SAG WHICH IS VIRTUALLY UNANIMOUS, AND (E) AGREEMENT THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAS BEEN SURPRISED TO THE POINT OF DISBELIEF BY THE U.S. MOVES. AMONG THE WORDS USED BY GOL OFFICIALS TO DESCRIBE SOUTH AFRICAN REACTION WERE: "SHOCK...HURT...TAKEN ABACK".

3. THESE REACTIONS HAVE COME TO THE EMBASSY STAFF AND MYSELF, OFTEN UNSOLICITED, FROM A WIDE RANGE OF GOL OFFICIALS INCLUDING THE ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER, SPEAKER OF THE PARLIAMENT, AND SEVERAL LEADING UNIVERSITY OFFICIALS. IN A CALL ON ACTING FONMIN LEROTHOLI, AN INTIMATE OF PRIME MINISTER JONATHAN, FOR EXAMPLE, I FOUND HIM BARELY ABLE TO SUPPRESS HIS DELIGHT WITH THE NEW U.S. POLICY WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS A "LONG-DELAYED U.S. DECLARATION OF INCOMPATIBILITY OF APARTHEID WITH FREE WORLD LEADERSHIP". LEROTHOLI WAS PARTICULARLY PLEASED WITH THE STATEMENT THAT CONTINUATION OF APARTHEID AND DENIAL OF FULL PARTICIPATION OF BLACKS IN GOVERNMENT WOULD "IMPAIR DIPLOMATIC, ECONOMIC AND OTHER RELATIONS". HE NOTED THE IMPORTANCE TACTICALLY OF NOT APPEARING TO BE "TELLING THE SAG WHAT IT MUST DO". THEY ARE A "PROUD AND ARROGANT PEOPLE", HE COMMENTED, AND ANY "GLOATING IN PUBLIC" WOULD RISK DRIVING THEM INTO THE "LAAGER".

4. SPEAKER OF THE PARLIAMENT AND ALSO MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS MAPATHE SAID SAG HAD BEEN "HURT" AND IS NOW EXPERIENCING "SHOCK OF DISBELIEF. THEY NEVER THOUGHT CONFIDENTIAL

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YOU WOULD DO IT." THEY SAID THE REASON WAS THE SAG BELIEF THAT THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE CAPE ROUTE WOULD BE DECISIVE IN U.S. POLICY COUNCILS "AS IN THE PAST". WORKS MINISTER STRESSED THAT THE NEW U.S. POLICY WAS NECESSARY TO SAVE SOUTHERN AFRICA, INCLUDING SAG ITSELF, FROM THE COMMUNISM IT FEARS AND DETESTS. APARTHEID AND DENIAL OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, HE SAID, WERE DRIVING PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA, INCLUDING SOME BASOTHO, TO EMBRACE COMMUNISM BECAUSE OF ITS PROMISE OF ARMS AND ACCOMPANYING IDEOLOGY OF LIBERATION BY ARMS STRUGGLE.

5. LOOKING AHEAD, GOL OFFICIALS WERE UNANIMOUS IN THEIR BELIEF THAT IT WILL TAKE TIME FOR THE INITIAL SHOCK OF THE U.S. POLICY CHANGE TO SINK IN, THAT "DEPENDING ON HOW IT IS TREATED IN PUBLIC" THE POLICY MAY PROVOKE A "DEFENSIVE REACTION AND TURNING INWARD, ESPECIALLY BY THE LOWLAND FARMERS", IN THE WORDS OF ONE SENIOR GOL OFFICIAL. ONCE THE SHOCK HAS PASSED AND THE REALITY IS FACED, GOL OFFICIALS EXPECT SAG TO COME TO TERMS WITH THE HARD REALITY,

I.E., THAT THE U.S., THEIR LAST HOPE, IS NOT WITH THEM.
"IT WILL TAKE TIME", WAS THE GENERAL COMMENT, BUT THE SAG HAS NO
OPTION BUT TO MAKE CHANGES. MINISTER LEROTHOLI THOUGHT
"LIBERAL OPINION" IN SOUTH AFRICA WAS ALREADY STRONGER THAN
IS GENERALLY REALIZED. HE SAW SIGNIFICANCE EVEN IN RECENT
CHANGES, E.G., THE RESIGNATION OF MINISTER HERZOG AND SAG
TRIAL BALLOONS ABOUT POSSIBLE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION FOR
BLACKS OUTSIDE HOMELANDS. (IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT SAME
UNANIMITY OF GOL OPINION DOES NOT EXIST REGARDING RHODESIA
WHERE GOL IS SPLIT BETWEEN THOSE FAVORING RELIANCE ON ARMS
STRUGGLE AND THOSE FAVORING EMPHASIS ON PEACEFUL SOLUTION
THROUGH NEGOTIATION (MASERU 726).

6. COMMENT: THE NEW U.S. POLICY TOWARD SOUTH AFRICA,
AND THE STEPS TAKEN THUS FAR TO IMPLEMENT IT, HAVE BEEN
GREETED WITH SCARCELY CONCEALED ENTHUSIASM IN LESOTHO,
DESPITE THE GOL'S APPRECIATION OF THE RISKS, DIFFICULTIES
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AND TENSIONS THAT LIE AHEAD. IT IS THE POLICY THAT LEADING
GOL OFFICIALS SAY THEY HAVE PROPOSED FOR YEARS. DESPITE
THE DELAY, THEY ARE GRATEFUL THAT THE U.S. HAS TAKEN THE
STEP WHICH THEY FEEL WAS INEVITABLE GIVEN OUR HISTORY AND
TRADITIONS.
NORLAND

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